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ABSTRACT

Minorities face a myriad of fundamental problems in educational programs. These problems are tied to ever increasing politics prevalent in higher education. Traditionally, politics has been linked to education raising questions concerning first, the role of higher education in reducing endemic problems confronting minorities, and second, the pursuit of educational goals by minority groups within the political setting. Since education continues to be the key for upward class mobility of minorities in the American society, there is a need for intrinsically engineered and institutionally established strategies that go beyond mere acceptability to productivity in higher education. Possible perspectives for minorities seeking to broaden their bases via education avenues in the future must include the development of time-management skills for goal-setting and goal-attainment of minority students. Institutions need to infuse multiculturalism into their programs through restructuring curricula, reforming testing and instruction, and adopt nontraditional methods. Four strategic phases can be identified for minorities in the 21st century: acceptance, acclimatization, responsibility and productivity. (Contains 49 references.) (Author/JB)

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The Politics of Higher Education: Perspectives for Minorities in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Minorities face a myriad of fundamental problems in educational programs. These problems are tied to ever increasing politics prevalent in higher education. Traditionally, politics is linked to education. As the society approaches the 21st century, two important questions seem inevitable. What role is higher education playing to reduce the endemic problems confronting minorities? Should minorities pursue their educational goals in the midst of politics? Education continues to be the key for upward class mobility of minorities in the American society. This, in earnest, will call for intrinsically engineered and institutionally established strategies that go beyond mere acceptability to productivity in higher eduction. This paper presents perspectives for minorities seeking to broaden their bases via educational avenues in the 21st century.

The Politics of Higher Education:
Perspectives for Minorities in the 21st Century

Politics has continued to be an integral part of education. In Athens, one arm of ancient Greek civilization, Socrates challenged the indoctrinating system of education by the Sophists. He advocated a system of question and answer that stimulated the divergent thinking of the Athenian youth. His ideas did not appeal to the Sophists who controlled the Athenian society; and before long, he was accused of impiety to the gods and of corrupting the youth. In Sparta, the other arm of the Greek civilization, children were challenged to be disciplined through drills and training. They were flogged when they misbehaved, and the goal was "to flog the devil out of the child." Apparently, the ancient Greek civilization did not divorce politics from education.

Historically, American schools have been challenged to respond to individual and collective growth (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1987; Clark, 1988; Obiakor, 1990, 1991, 1992). The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 are some of the political steps taken by legislators to direct educational policies in the United States. These laws have been geared toward inclusiveness and toward enhancing the quality of life of different people of America, irrespective of race, color, religion, gender, and national origin.

Recent reports and studies on educational reforms have had widespread political implications (Cuban, 1990). These reports have emphasized higher test scores and quality in education and less on equity and common sense approaches that work (Obiakor, 1990, 1991, 1992). America's higher education has been vulnerable in this regard. For instance, affirmative action regulations, instituted to respond to discriminatory exclusionary policies, have been excessively politicized. Ironically, these regulations have been aimed at the recruitment and retention of minority staff, faculty and students in higher education. Some minority scholars (Loury, 1985 and Williams, 1990) have resented these regulations because of their negative impact on the self-identify of minorities. How, then, can minorities respond to these political "boiling pots"? What should America's higher education do to respond to multiculturalism? This paper will respond to these questions and present perspectives for minorities seeking to broaden their bases via educational avenues in the 21st century.

Aims of American Education

Minorities have always struggled for equal access to education. Cole (1983) noted that this struggle "has been long and arduous" (p.246). Many minorities understand that the only route out of the ghetto or poverty is education. Goodlad (1979), in his book, What are schools for identified major goals of American schools which include:

1. Mastery of basic skills or fundamental process.
2. Career and vocational education.

3. Intellectual development.
4. Enculturation.
5. Interpersonal relations.
6. Autonomy.
7. Citizenship.
8. Creativity and aesthetic perception.
9. Self-concept.
10. Emotional and physical well-being.
11. Moral and ethical character.
12. Self-realization.

These goals are synonymous with the general aims of higher education in America. A logical extension is that these goals are necessary if individuals are to survive in the 21st century. An important question comes to mind. Should minorities be more concerned with the politics surrounding these goals or how to achieve these goals? The reality is that minority students have to be prepared to play the political "game" if they are to succeed in college and in life. Sadly, some of these students have been ill-prepared to play the "game." For example, most minority homes emphasize "love," "goodness," "likeness," "kindness," and "humanity." On the contrary, most educational environments emphasize "quality," "performance," "excellence," and "cognition" (Obiakor 1992). These constructs create conflict for many minority students. This conflict is evident in results made by these students in standardized tests (e.g. American College Test, Scholastic Aptitude Test, National Teacher Examination, etc.).

There are other related problems that hinder minorities from succeeding in higher education. These problems include (a) the theory of biological determinism which subscribes to the principle that "worth can be assigned to individuals and groups by measuring intelligence as a single quantity" (Gould, 1981, p.20); (b) the use of standardized instruments as solutions (rather than as ingredients) for inappropriate classification, categorization, and placement (Anrig, 1985; Hilliard, 1989; Ogbu, 1988); (c) the negative perceptual assumption that minorities have "low" or "negative" self-concept because they experience failure in school programs (Obiakor, 1990; Obiakor & Alawiye, 1991); (d) the insufficiency of realistic role models (e.g. minority teachers) who understand their history, symbols, cultural values, and learning styles (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1987; Harvey & Scott-Jones, 1985; Obiakor & Barker, 1990; Staples, 1984); and (e) the lack of multiethnic education to foster cultural acceptance or diversity (Banks, 1977, 1986; Ehrenreich, 1991; Gay, 1988). It has become increasingly apparent that minority students are at risk on college campuses. According to Clark (1988), at-risk students are frequently "robbed of self-esteem and the capacity to achieve" (p.iii). It is reasonable to argue, then, that the fundamental aims of education have eluded many minorities in America's higher education due to some myths on multiculturalism.

What is Multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism has been misrepresented by educators and

scholars. As a construct, it has been defined and redefined. In reality, multiculturalism is and multiethnicity are synonymous. When multiculturalism is put into proper perspective, people begin to appreciate inter-individual and intra-individual differences with respect to style, culture, symbol, language, value and history. Bank (1991), Hilliard (1991), Newton (1992), Parekh (1986), and Ross (1991) reiterated that multiculturalism perpetuates freedom, reduces racism and promotes cultural diversity. Put another way, multicultural curriculum provides an antidote to the traditional Eurocentric curriculum. As a consequence, multiculturalism corrects the miseducation of students, provides them with the total life experience, and advocates inclusion rather than exclusion both in curriculum and manpower. A logical extension is that multiculturalism enhances the self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-ideal of minority students and faculty.

In this day and age, the reality of multicult uralism is very apparent. Mendenhall (1991) indicated that "the more everyone in a group knows and understands the same set of social values, the less interpersonal problems will result between group members" (p.D7). In a similar fashion, Ross (1991) suggested:

> The way that the demographics are rapidly changing, Whites are going to be in the minority within the next ten years. Thus, it would behoove those that are ignorant and not receptive to other cultures to strive to be open-minded and accepting of people and their differences, so that we can all live in harmony. (p.A4)

The changing demography mentioned by Ross will affect the work force in schools and communities. Mendenhall affirmed that "in

many parts of the United States it is a reality -- and it is predicted that by the year 2010 it will be reality for the entire American work place" (p.D7). The question is, How prepared are America's higher education to respond to these challenges in the 21st Century? Presumptuous statements have replaced realities in higher education (Obiakor, 1992). Consider a few examples:

1. Minority students must understand that this is America, a land of competition.
2. We cannot find qualified minority students for academic scholarships.
3. We cannot find qualified minority faculty for recruitment.
4. It is a preferential treatment to adopt policies to recruit and retain minority faculty, staff and students.
5. Multicultural curriculum is expensive.
6. Multicultural curriculum is not necessary because there are a few minority students.
7. Multiculturalism is not necessary because racism does not exist anymore.
8. Affirmative action regulations are unfair to the majority in the university
9. Changes to reflect multiethnicity in higher education should be gradual.
10. Advocates of multiculturalism want to lower the quality of education.

These presumptuous statements are myths that have permeated higher

education. These myths have continued to create problems for administrators, faculty, staff and students of institutions of higher learning in America. How can these institutions be good examples for the American society when they are unable to remedy existing educational disparities? Price (1991) wrote:

> I wonder, frankly, how we can bemoan the phenomena of tribalization and multiculturalism in our society if we are doing so little to eliminate the economic and educational disparities which fuel them. The appropriate antidote for increased separatism is a culture of inclusiveness which would infuse every facet of our society. To my mind, the blame for balkanization rests more with those who have the power to include but won't, and less with those on the outside who are barred entry. (p.8)

Infusing Multiculturalism into Higher Education

There are indications that institutions of higher learning have been ineffective in recruiting and retaining minority faculty and students. This trend cannot continue! America's higher education has to go beyond lip service to real solutions in the 21st century. Some of these solutions are discussed in the following subheadings.

Response to Regulations and Mandates

Regulations and mandates from state and federal legislators (e.g. affirmative action regulations) have tended to promote equity in the recruitment and retention of minority staff, faculty and students in higher education. University administrators should review the higher attrition rate of minority students in their respective programs. The "business-as-usual" mentality promotes the old-boy network, leaves the status quo unchallenged, and fails to address the recruitment and retention needs of minorities in

higher education. Harvey and Scott-Jones (1985) denounced the prevalent lip service in the recruitment of Blacks in higher education. He wrote:

> Although institutions pay lip service to affirmative action, and individual instances of successful Black faculty members exist, Blacks remain severely underrepresented on predominantly White college and university faculties. Even as the number of Ph.D.s awarded to Blacks has increased, many searches for new faculty still conclude with a thoroughly remorseful committee chair explaining that the position is not being offered to a Black person because, 'We couldn't find any.' (p.68)

The "We could not find any" phenomenon will be eventually challenged in the 21st century. It is important to note, however, that group all minority members do not favor government regulations, especially when they do not foster quality. Minority scholars (Loury, 1985; and Williams, 1990) have resented federal regulations, e.g. affirmative action mandates. They have argued that these mandates have negative impacts on the self-dignity of minorities. Majority students need to understand that minorities favor quality education; and that many minority professors and students are very competent. Educational mandates and regulations should be proactively pursued to provide opportunities for minority and majority faculty, staff and students on college campuses.

Provision of Funds

Funds are important to increase the retention of minority students in higher education. Most of these students are first-generation college students who come from low to middle income homes. Scholarships, grants and college work study programs should be provided to increase opportunities and choices. Corporations

and businesses should support students through scholarships and Foundations. Efforts should be made to monitor (a) who receives funds, (b) why people receive funds, and (c) what financial options are available to students. Minority students are sometimes unaware of available resources in predominately White colleges and universities. The excuse in some quarters is that there is money but there is no qualified minority student. To this effect, institutions of higher learning need to seek out qualified minority students and convince them that they are valued. Often than not, feelings of alienation create early attrition for many minority students (Obiakor & Lassiter, 1986). President Bill Clinton's visionary idea of establishing a National Service Trust Fund will be excellent for many minorities in the 21st century. Clinton (1992), in his book, Putting people first: A national economic strategy for America wrote:

> To give every American the right to borrow money for college, we will scrap the existing student loan program and establish a National Service Trust Fund. Those who borrow from the fund will be able to choose how to repay the balance: either as a small percentage of their earnings over time, or by serving their communities for one or two years doing work their country needs as teachers, law enforcement officers, health care workers, or peer counselors helping kids stay off drugs and in school. (pp. 16-17)

Reorganization of Curricula

The demand for broadening the curricula in higher education is not new. The challenge in the 21st century will be on including those elements of curricula that touch on all facets of the society. Institutions of higher learning should generate courses that address divergent aspects of ethnicity and culture of the

people of America and the world. Textbooks that belittle other cultures should be deleted. For example, some books still teach that Blacks have intelligent quotients of two standard deviations below the mean (IQs of 74 or less). Such texts have no place in higher education. Thomas and Alawiye (1990) decried the non-representation of achievements of minority members of the society in the literature. They asserted:

> Our examination of selected elementary textbooks, grades 1 to 6 disclosed that the historical background and cultural contributions of slaves in early America are ignored. In particular, the art, architecture, literature, and music contributed by West Africans during their enslavement in the American South are excluded. (p.20)

The implication of Thomas and Alawiye's statement is that some texts used on college campuses have excluded achievements of some of America's peoples. Higher education should be proactive in portraying the achievement of various people of America. For instance, in the Children's Literature courses taught in colleges, books that reflect all cultures should be selected. Newton (1992) argued that "until we realize that there are differences and learn from those, racism will prevail" (p.A4).

Redirection of Testing and Instruction

There is no doubt that testing is a burning issue that will be dealt with in the 21st century. The U.S. Department of Education (1991) in its book, America 2000: An education strategy mapped out six national goals "to jump start a new generation of American schools, transforming a 'Nation at Risk' into a Nation of Students'" (p.59). With all its good intentions, the "America

2000" program has a fundamental flaw, i.e. excessive reliance on national testing (Obiakor, 1992; Trent, 1992). Many scholars and educators despise the excessive reliance on standardized testing because environmental factors (such as nutrition, self-concept, motivation, anxiety, examiner race, test sophistication, and language) have been found to affect academic and test performance (Gould, 1981; Hillard, 1989; Obiakor & Alawiye, 1991; Ogbu, 1987, 1988, 1990; Samuda, 1975). It is apparent that tests may produce consistent results, but may not measure what they purport to measure. Minority students, like their White peers, differ inter-individually and intra-individually in test-taking skills (Minton & Schneider, 1980). College programs have continuously relied on scores made in the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the American College Test (ACT), and the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) for admission. To be teachers, students have to make passing scores in the National Teacher Examination (NTE). There are other standardized tests that students must take to be admitted into the graduate school--these requirements create tremendous problems for many minority students. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) (1987) reported that the number of minorities in teacher education is small when compared to the number of minority group children in public schools. The AACTE (1987) exposed a survey conducted by the National Education Association which unveiled that:

1. Blacks represent 16.2% of the children in public schools, but only 6.9% of the teachers.

2. Hispanics represent 9.1% of the children in public schools, but only 1.9% of the teachers.
3. Asians/Pacific Islanders represent 2.5% of the children in public schools, but only 0.9% of the teachers.
4. American Indians/Alaskan Natives represent 0.9% of the children in public schools, but only 0.6% of the teachers.

Based on the above data, colleges and universities should foster a pluralistic society through multiethnic education in their classes (Banks, 1977, 1986; Gay, 1981). The trend in the 21st century will be for university professors to acknowledge (a) historical backgrounds of their minority students, (b) languages and symbols that minority students bring to class, (c) behavioral patterns of minority students, (d) cultural beliefs of minority students, and (e) events which have molded minority group members. The complex web of informal rules and processes should be eradicated to increase academic opportunities, choices and achievements for minority students. These students need to know that they can compete and excel in different college programs.

Awareness of Expectations

Many administrators in colleges and universities have failed to understand that their programs do not reflect the general community. Minorities are sometimes viewed as unqualified persons imposed on them because of their race, color, ethnicity, gender or national origin (Obiakor, 1991, 1992). This perception has led to bigotry and racism in many programs. Minority students should

understand the "dos and don'ts" of university environments. As Banks (1977) pointed out some years ago:

> ...We live in a world society beset with momentous social and human problems, many of which are related to ethnic hostility and conflict. Effective solutions to these critical problems can be found only by an active, compassionate, and ethnically sensitive citizenry capable of making sound decision that will benefit our ethnically diverse world community. (p.32)

Adoption of Nontraditional Methods

Traditional strategies have failed to infuse multiculturalism into higher education. Most minority students are nontraditional students; and it is unrealistic to use traditional strategies to work with nontraditional students. The 21st century will be much more challenging. As a consequence, nontraditional strategies should be used to respond to (a) affirmative action regulations, (b) educational finances, (c) curricula organization, (d) tests and instruction, and (e) expectations. Richardson (1989) identified nontraditional strategies that will assist colleges and universities to foster multiculturalism, namely:

1. Early intervention in public schools to strengthen preparation and improve students' educational planning.
2. Summer "bridge" programs to accustom minority students to college-level coursework and the campus atmosphere before they begin college.
3. Special orientation programs to help with choice of courses and registration.
4. Tailored financial-aid programs, including policies that recognize students who may not be able to contribute as much in summer earnings to their aid package if they participate in bridge programs.
5. Strong academic-assessment programs, coupled with courses designed to offset gaps in preparations.
6. Adequate tutoring services, learning laboratories, and organized "monitoring" programs.
7. Intrusive academic advising to guide selection of coursesand to intervene before small problems become major.

8. Career guidance to translate nonspecific educational goals into programs of study where coursework and desired outcomes are clearly linked. (p. A48)

Strategic Phases for Minorities in the 21st Century

As indicated earlier, on many predominately White colleges and universities, minorities confront a myriad of problems. Some are self-induced and others are environmentally created. For example, minorities who are ill-prepared in high school cannot be expected to perform academic miracles in college. They need supports that go beyond traditional methods to prevent them from dropping out of college and becoming societal problems.

To survive academically in the 21st century, minorities have to understand the university milieu and expectations. As Obiakor and Lassiter (1988) pointed out, four strategic phases (acceptance, acclimatization, responsibility and productivity) are critical in this regard. These phases will be very useful in recruiting, retaining and graduating minority students in the 21st century.

Acceptance Phase

While feelings of acceptance increase retention and positive attitudes needed for academic survival of minorities in predominately White colleges, feelings of alienation contribute to early attrition (Bean & Hull, 1984; Edmonds, 1984; Suen, 1983; Turner, 1969). Being accepted to a White college or university will not be an end in itself in the 21st century. White professors tend to maintain a more formal relationship and/or an unfriendly relationship with minorities. This contributes to feelings of alienation. As means of fitting into the "White" system, the

feelings of alienation force minority students to (a) define academic success as White peoples' prerogative, (b) discourage their peers, and (c) perhaps unconsciously "act white" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Although some educators would label these responses as inferiority complex, Harvey and Scott-Jones (1985) and Lassiter (1985) noted that minority students have fewer members or community role models from which to learn about the university milieu and expectations.

Therefore, in the acceptance phase, the college community should convince minority students very early that it is interested in them, that help is available, and that they expect them to do well. Frantic efforts should be made to reduce academic racism (Obiakor, 1986 and Staples, 1984); and proper communication, understanding, and trust should be established to promote feelings of real acceptance if minorities are to suceed in the 21st century.

The Acclimatization Phase

Many minority students get lost in the system because of the lack of detailed information about the resources on the college campus (Brown, 1987; Tinto, 1982). In this phase, minority student organizations (fraternities and sororities) should play remarkable roles in socializing new college entrants, and in helping them to develop positive attitudes. For example, student organizations should introduce new entrants to the physical terrain of the campus, including the whereabouts of basic resources such as the library and bookstore.

Other retention programs (e.g. Centers for Academic

Achievement, Learning Assistance, Counseling and Advising, Financial Aid, and Programs such as The First Start and Special Student Services) should work cooperatively. Moreover, tutorial services should be provided together with skills needed for time management, studying, note-taking and test-taking. The systematic monitoring of specialized programs and positive networking milieu between the college community and minority students must be fostered if minorities are to survive in the 21st century.

The Responsibility Phase

Minority college students usually have the "me-first" syndrome which overshadows their responsiveness to the needs of fellow students. Because many minorities are first-generation college students, they give top priority to getting high paying jobs while overlooking the responsibility phase of college life. These students fail to understand (or are unaware) that responsibility transcends all transactions in life. To foster student responsibility, college and university administrators should organize leadership seminars that address the organizational structure of the college and its relationship to the general community. A well planned leadership seminar should incorporate:

1. An invitation of minority graduate or senior level students to accept leadership roles.
2. An assembly of well-prepared package of current leadership materials for later distribution.
3. An invitation of speakers from the minority community to represent good role models.

4. Rewards given for punctuality and meaningful participation.

5. A presentation of Certificates of Award to participants.

The Productivity Phase

At this stage, minority students should begin to ask themselves, "Are we really having our presence felt where it counts on this campus?" In the productivity phase, the minority networking milieu should endeavor to destroy the stereotypes which hinder acceptance into the mainstream of academic life in White colleges. As important elements of the society, minorities would need to direct their energies toward positive production that would reflect their accurate self-identity, self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-ideal. In this productivity phase, both non-traditional collective and individual approaches are needed. This collective approach should require minority students to become active participants in developing supportive networking systems and institutional mechanisms for success in college. The individual approach should focus on developing positive self-image and success-oriented attitudes. These approaches will be needed in the 21st century.

Perspectives for the 21st Century

Different reports and studies have revealed that fewer numbers of minority administrators, faculty, staff and students are in America's higher education. Many colleges and universities have focused on reforms that resulted from these reports. The emphasis have been on "quality" and "excellence" rather than on "equity" and

common sense approaches that work. In the 21st century, the rat race for educational reforms will not be the answer. The answer will lie within the realistic intent of institutions of higher learning to attack inequities through practical implementation of multiculturalism and multiethnicity in recruitment, retention and instructional policies. Challenges that face our public schools today reflect challenges that will face higher education tomorrow. These challenges will continue as long as institutions are not challenged to respond to the needs of all members of the society.

What, then, should be the role of minority faculty, staff and students in the 21st century? The understanding has to be clear that education is (and will continue to be) the key to minority success in mainstream society. Getting an education is not an easy task. The challenges will even be greater in the 21st century. To succeed academically, minority students should (a) attend classes, (b) concentrate in classes, (c) take good notes, (d) study their notes, (e) remember what they have studied, (f) prepare for tests, (g) take tests, and (h) pass tests (Obiakor & Area, 1990). Simply put, time-management skills will continue to be important for goal-setting and goal-attainment of minority students in the 21st century. Our civil rights should start from within. The 21st century will be a period for proactive measures. We cannot continue to blame our socio-economic background, color, race, gender, or national origin for our inability to solve our problems. As we approach the 21st century, we must adopt intrinsically engineered and institutionally established proactive strategies to

tackle the ever increasing political games on college and university campuses.

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